

Clear the Decks

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Clear the Decks

by [dracoqueen22](#)

Summary

Ratchet and Rodimus had it easy, with their Drift-shaped buffer between them, but that wouldn't last forever. Luckily, Ratchet has a suggestion or two for how they can even the field.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

The sound of the door chiming stirred Rodimus from his nap. Though if anyone asked, it wasn't a nap so much as he was watching a documentary with his optics shuttered. He'd promised, after all, that he would watch this. And he would. Just, you know, after a nap.

Drift wouldn't have chimed the door. He'd have let himself in given that he had the codes. Ultra Magnus would have pinged Rodimus ahead of time. No one in the crew had ever visited, as far as Rodimus remembered.

It was odd.

Rodimus swung his legs over the side of the berth and rose, stretching his arms over his head. He glanced guiltily at the vidscreen – the credits were rolling, he'd missed the entire documentary. He'd have to start over.

The door chimed again.

“Coming!” Rodimus called out, unnecessary but if it stopped the noise, all the better.

He rubbed the back of his head as he keyed the door open, fighting back a yawn. He blinked in surprise.

“Ratchet?” Rodimus peered up at the medic, wondering if he was dreaming. He leaned out the door, looking up and down the hallway, but Ratchet was alone. “Where’s Drift? He’s not hurt, is he? Is that why you’re here?” Panic strobed through his spark. What happened?”

Ratchet held up a hand, forestalling his anxiety. “Calm down, Rodimus. Drift’s fine.” He lowered his hand. “He’s with Perceptor.”

Relief flooded Rodimus’ spark, though his defensive protocols were slower to dial down. “Oh. Geez. Don’t scare me like that.”

The answer didn’t offer an explanation for why Ratchet was here though. The visit, in itself, was weird. Ratchet had the codes. Why didn’t he let himself in? Why did he ping the door instead?

Ratchet didn’t apologize. He stared at Rodimus, his expression unreadable, before he asked, “Can I come in?”

Rodimus startled. “Oh, right. Yeah. Sorry.” He stepped back and waved Ratchet inside. “You know you don’t have to ask, right? Or I mean, you shouldn’t have to. Um.” His glossa tangled inside his mouth. He felt like an idiot.

“I know. That’s part of the problem,” Ratchet sighed, but he entered. His armor was clamped tight to his frame, and what wisps of his field Rodimus could sense rippled with a general unease.

It occurred to Rodimus, just then, that he didn’t spend much time with Ratchet without Drift around. In fact, he couldn’t recall a single instance he had been with Ratchet alone. They always had their Drift-shaped neutral zone between them.

“There’s a problem?” Rodimus asked. Unease filtered into his spark as well.

The door closed, and Rodimus lingered near it. Ratchet didn’t go very far either. If tension had a tangible presence, Rodimus figured it was here now, pulling between them like sticky webbing.

“I should feel like I can just come inside.” Ratchet paused by Rodimus’ personal console and chair, fingers knocking along the back of the latter. He stared at the rolling credits as if trying to figure out what Rodimus had been watching. “I shouldn’t feel like a visitor. But I do.”

Rodimus worked his intake. He wished Drift were here. Drift would know what to say. “Well, this is new to all of us.” He scuffed a foot against the floor. “And weird.”

“I know.” Ratchet swept a hand over his head, armor shuffling around his frame before settling back tight against his protoform. “So that’s why I’m here. We should fix it.”

“Okay.” Fixing anything was generally a good idea. Rodimus pointedly looked around the room as though the answer would leap up and present itself to him. “So… how?”

Ratchet knocked his knuckles on the back of the chair again and then seemed to gather his courage, locking his shoulders as he looked directly at Rodimus. “You and me. Let’s do something. Together.”

Rodimus blinked. "...What?"

"Or a drink. You seem to like that well enough," Ratchet continued, and he sounded, of all things, flustered. He'd never heard Ratchet babble a day in his life, but it felt like he was on the verge of doing so.

Rodimus honestly wasn't sure what was weirder. That Ratchet was asking him out, or that Ratchet sounded flustered. He didn't know Ratchet was capable of being flustered. The medic seemed like he was perpetually cranky and in control.

It bothered him that Ratchet was flustered. Like a reminder he wasn't this immortal image of Autobot leadership and poise, but a mech. Just a regular mech.

No. Maybe that didn't bother Rodimus after all. Maybe it was a relief.

Rodimus nibbled on his bottom lip and looked around the room, hoping to find the appropriate answer that wouldn't anger Ratchet. "I do," he said slowly, carefully. "But I don't understand why that's relevant."

"Because we're in a relationship," Ratchet said, and his vents gusted sharply from exasperation. "And that's the kind of thing people in relationships do."

Relationship?

Rodimus gave Ratchet a blank look. Okay, yes. They were both kind of dating Drift. They had this strange configuration with Drift in the middle. But relationship? Rodimus thought that was being generous.

Ratchet looked pained, like someone had fed him a bad batch of energon, or that dredge Swerve called his daily special. "We're not sharing Drift," he continued, each word bitten out like it hurt him to admit. "That's not the point of this."

Rodimus' optical ridges drew down. "... Isn't it?" Now he was really confused. This whole conversation didn't make sense.

Ratchet's frustration made Rodimus frustrated because it felt like they spoke two different languages and needed someone to serve as translator. Ratchet said one thing but meant another, and Rodimus never knew how to handle Ratchet. That was more Drift's area of expertise.

Why couldn't Drift be here?

Ratchet scrubbed his face. "All right. We need to talk."

Rodimus cringed. "Do we have to?" Talking wasn't exactly his forte. He was better at action. Drift usually did the talking.

"Yes." Ratchet looked around the room a bit helplessly before he pulled out the chair at Rodimus' console and plopped down. "Sit."

"It's my room," Rodimus pointed out.

"You want to hike back to my habsuite so I can make you sit down there?" Ratchet asked.

Rodimus flushed.

He perched on the edge of the berth, since Ratchet had taken the only chair. If they'd been in Ratchet and Drift's quarters, they could have shared a couch. Rodimus didn't have such a luxury. He didn't need one. There was only him here.

"Look." Ratchet leaned forward, elbows on his knees, lacing his fingers together. "I know the one making this hard is me. And I know you're playing it safe because you don't want to slag me off. But you're a part of this now. You can be a little selfish, too."

Rodimus gnawed on his bottom lip. Heat slipped into his face, and he looked away. "I think I've been selfish enough for one lifetime," he murmured. If he started naming all the reasons why, he'd never stop.

"Not when it comes to this," Ratchet insisted. "There are three of us in this relationship now. Not a pairing plus one. Not me and Drift plus you. We're all together."

Rodimus shook his head, something squeezing tight around his spark. "Look, I appreciate you trying to make me feel better, but we all know what's really going on." He spread his hands, his shoulders sinking. "I'm the late addition. The third wheel."

"No, you're not."

"Come on!" Rodimus blurted out and rocketed to his feet, filled with a restless energy. "We both know you only put up with me for Drift's sake." It hurt, his spark ached to admit it, but he knew it was true.

He and Ratchet had rarely, if ever, seen optic to optic on anything. He was honestly surprised Ratchet didn't loathe him, not that disappointment was any better. Ratchet had a much better Prime in Optimus. They were friends. Of course he'd see Rodimus as nothing but a pale imitation.

And now, Rodimus was an annoyance to suffer through in order to keep his beloved happy. Rodimus knew where he belonged in their coupling, and he put up with it because he loved Drift, and this was better than being without.

Ratchet looked at him then, and he looked... well, Rodimus couldn't really describe it. "Well, it may have started out that way." He coughed a vent, gaze slanting away. "But it can't continue."

Rodimus spark stuttered. "Wh-- what do you mean?" Was Ratchet ending things? Was that why he'd come here? Because Drift hadn't wanted to say it to Rodimus' face?

"That I want you to start taking this – us – seriously," Ratchet said.

Relief flooded Rodimus' field in a tidal wave. Thank Primus. It wasn't over. It had barely begun, and it wasn't over, and Rodimus hadn't already screwed things up after all.

Thank Primus.

Rodimus vented out. "Oh." He worked his intake, trying to find confidence and drape it back over his shoulders. "I'm serious, Ratchet. I don't know why you think I'm not."

“You are?” Ratchet arched an orbital ridge and pointed at the floor in front of him. “Then go on a frigging date with me and stop acting like you don’t know what I’m talking about.”

Rodimus blinked. He paused mid-pace. “What?” One didn’t connect to the other. Ratchet wasn’t making sense.

“This is only going to work if both of us make an effort,” Ratchet shifted in the chair, which creaked beneath him. “So I’m reaching out to you. I want to try.”

Rodimus stared at him. “But you hate me,” he said, and despised how small his voice came out, how much truth there was in it. He immediately wished he hadn’t said it, and wished he could take it back, offer something far more flippant.

Instead, he flushed and looked away. He folded his arms, wishing he had a window to look through instead. Maybe Cyclonus had it right. The stars were a safer image. People were far too difficult.

“I hate this conversation,” Ratchet muttered. He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Look, Rodimus. You’re not without charm, and clearly, I don’t mind you in my berth. But we won’t get any further than that unless we spend time together.”

Wow.

Rodimus wouldn’t exactly call that a stirring endorsement.

He squinted at the medic. “Wouldn’t that count as one of your worst nightmares?” he asked, aiming for flippant, but failure struck all over again. Instead, he sounded self-flagellating.

Zero for two today Rodimus. Good job there.

Ratchet’s lips pressed in a thin line. His engine revved, as though he was biting several sarcastic remarks, and Rodimus supposed he could cooperate a bit more.

“Sorry,” he said, and let his shoulders sink down. Submissive. Ratchet preferred that, yes? “All right. I’ll do it.”

Ratchet blinked, rearing back as though he expected acquiescence was the last thing he’d get from Rodimus. “Come again?”

Rodimus spread his hands, though he couldn’t work up any enthusiasm. This sounded like one of the worst ideas in the history of ever, but hey, at least it wasn’t his idea.

“Let’s try.” He managed a thin smile. “Let’s go on a date.” And hopefully, it wouldn’t be the most terrible time for both of them. Hopefully, he wouldn’t ruin it all.

Ratchet nodded slowly, carefully. “All right. Good. Then meet me at the docking bay after your shift this evening.” He stood from the chair, hands smoothing down the fluffed armor on his thighs.

“The docking bay?” Rodimus’ forehead crinkled. “Why?”

“Because we’re going on a date. Off-ship.”

Confusion seemed to be the emotion of the day. “I don’t remember us scheduling a stop.”

Ratchet grinned, and in it were the echoes of the mech he used to be. “I arranged for one. We’re stopping at a galactic trading outpost called Quartex. Welcoming to Cybertronians, don’t worry I checked, and they accept galactic creds.”

Rodimus cast about for sanity, but it kept slipping through his fingers. “What... how did you...?” He couldn’t find words either, apparently.

This conversation was going in no direction Rodimus could have anticipated.

“Ultra Magnus likes me.” Ratchet had the audacity to chuckle, his optics sparkling with humor. He smiled, and it took centuries off his face, out of his field. Rodimus’ spark throbbed. “It was easy enough to convince Megatron.”

“Who are you and what did you do with Ratchet?” Rodimus asked, bewildered. He didn’t recognize the grinning medic in front of him. Where were the dour lines? The constant waft of disappointment in his field?

Ratchet slipped closer, into Rodimus’ personal space and the outermost range of his field. “I’m who I’ve always been, Roddy,” he murmured, voice low and... sultry? Enticingly so. A shiver danced through Rodimus’ lines. “Now’s my chance to show you. And you better show me who you are, too. Because that’s who I want to see.”

“Uh. Okay,” Rodimus said, because he was too flustered to come up with anything clever. Now here he was, the one flustered and left on unsteady ground.

Especially when Ratchet reached for him, and Rodimus offered his hand without thinking twice about it. Static crackled between them when they touched, and Ratchet smirked. Said smirk did things to Rodimus, things that coiled hot and heavy in his grin.

Ratchet pulled him into a kiss, mostly chaste for all that it was a brush of their mouths. But it left electric fire dancing in Rodimus’ lines, and he chased after Ratchet’s departing lips with his own.

“I’ll see you later,” Ratchet murmured against his mouth.

“Uh huh,” Rodimus replied, dazed.

Ratchet chuckled, the sound of it rolling down Rodimus’ spinal strut, and then he was gone, leaving Rodimus standing in his quarters feeling like he’d been bowled over by a Decepticon.

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Rodimus arrived in the docking bay ten minutes before he was supposed to because anxiety had him pacing back and forth on the bridge. Ultra Magnus had arrived to take over for him early because apparently, his agitation was infecting everyone else on the bridge, and Mainframe had commed Ultra Magnus out of sheer self-preservation.

Any other time, Rodimus would’ve been offended.

Gratitude swept him back to his quarters where he washed and made an effort to polish – part of him wishing Sunstreaker were still around so Rodimus could do more than a half-decent job. He'd stared at his scuffed appearance in the mirror for longer than was practical until he realized he couldn't make himself any more appealing.

Ratchet wasn't there.

Rodimus tried to find a place to wait. He lounged against a crate of supplies, attempting to be casual while he pretended to read a datapad. It was one of the ones Magnus had been harping on him to sign off on for ages.

He didn't absorb a single word.

"And here I was thinking you weren't going to show."

Rodimus abandoned the datapad he wasn't reading, tucking it into his subspace. "Why wouldn't I?" he asked as Ratchet approached him, still missing that casual arrogance Rodimus was so used to seeing wrapped around him. It kept throwing Rodimus for a loop that it wasn't there.

Ratchet lifted his shoulders. "Because it's pretty obvious that you're less than enthused by this whole idea."

"Hey, I didn't say that," Rodimus countered, his giddiness evaporating. "I was surprised, but if I wasn't interested I would've said no." He frowned, optics narrowing. "If there's anyone who doesn't want to be here, it's got to be you."

"I'm the one who had the idea!" Ratchet spluttered, hands raised, his armor puffing like he was about to head into battle.

The ease from the end of their earlier conversation was painful for its absence. What happened between now and then? Had Ratchet realized how much he didn't want to do this? Because that's what it felt like.

Rodimus ground his denta. He'd promised Drift he'd make this work. Drift had been so excited when Rodimus had commed him earlier to make sure it was alright he went out with Ratchet without Drift with them. Drift had been ecstatic. He'd only wanted them to have a good time. He promised Ratchet would be on his best behavior, and extracted a promise from Rodimus to try his best not to be antagonizing.

Drift wanted this to work. Honestly, Rodimus did, too. Not just because he'd get Drift out of the deal. But frag it. Was it hard to believe he liked Ratchet, too? Okay so maybe he hadn't really considered a relationship with Ratchet before, but that was only because he was certain it would never happen. Since Ratchet hated him and all.

Now here they were and it had been less than five minutes and Rodimus already wanted to stomp away in a huff, and Ratchet looked a vent away from shouting.

Rodimus offlined his optics and rubbed his forehead. He took a steadying ventilation. He could do this. He could be mature and non-antagonizing. He could try. He just really needed Ratchet to put in a little effort, too.

“Yes, it was,” Rodimus replied in the steadiest voice he could manage. He lowered his hand.
“What did you have in mind?”

Ratchet stared at him as if he’d sprouted a second pair of arms, a set of wings, and declared himself the new Winglord of Vos.

Rodimus squirmed under the look. He folded his arms and held his ground. He hoped he didn’t have to comm Drift for back up. Drift was counting on them to try. It was a pointless endeavor if they had to involve Drift.

“There’s a festival,” Ratchet finally said, his armor relaxing in increments. “It’s sort of like a muted version of Six Lasers over Cybertron. If you want to go.”

Rodimus’ optics widened. “Wait, you mean like with rides and unhealthy treats and stupid games you’re not supposed to win but cost a fortune?” His spoiler twitched before he could rein himself in.

Ratchet’s lips quirked in a soft smile. “Yes, exactly that. And our rich boyfriend gave me a nicely sized datachip.” He produced said datachip and gave it a wiggle.

Rodimus couldn’t decide which made him happier first. The amount of creds Drift no doubt had given them to spend, or the fact Ratchet had used the word ‘our’.

“Why didn’t you say so?” Rodimus asked. He snatched Ratchet’s free hand and started towing him toward the ramp, the sound of tinny music reaching his audials as he got closer to the opening.

Ratchet chuckled. “I’m thinking I should have.” He squeezed Rodimus’ hand. “Slow down, kid. The carnival’s not going anywhere anytime soon.”

Rodimus’ face flushed with heat. “Yeah, but…” He decelerated once they hit the steel walkway. “I’ve never been, you know, to Six Lasers. Always wanted to but I couldn’t. Out of my price range.” He shrugged, and disentangled his hand from Ratchet’s, raking it over his head. Ratchet probably didn’t want to hold his hand. “Was saving up and then, well, war.” He tucked his hands behind his back and tried to be dismissive. “It happens.”

“Yeah. War. Happens all the time,” Ratchet replied, his tone dry. “Well, this is no Six Lasers, but it should be entertaining.”

As it turned out, Ratchet wasn’t wrong.

Noise attacked them the closer they got to the carnival. Sight and sound flooded Rodimus’ sensors as Ratchet paid for them to enter and for an all-access bracelet, entirely sponsored by Drift’s datacard. Endless rides, free samples of every treat, and two free tries at every game of chance.

Drift was going to get such a reward later.

Rodimus expected Ratchet to be both grudging and grumpy, that he wouldn’t enjoy anything. That expectation was quickly dispelled by their very first stop: an arcade. Not the standalone games of chance, but a collection of games requiring tokens and varying degrees of skill. Ratchet parked himself in front of one and fed it a banker’s bag of tokens, as focused on the little coin spinning through the air, as he would be if he were trying to avoid bombarding artillery. He racked up quite the impressive score, and the game spat out a motherlode of tickets for him to collect.

Rodimus picked a game called ‘whack-a-mook’ and while he didn’t know what a mook was, it was damn cathartic to pour credits into the machine so he could keep banging their little green, spongy heads over and over, as they popped up from random holes. His ticket earnings weren’t quite as impressive as Ratchet’s, but he added them to their pile. Besides, he proved his mettle when they crammed themselves into the racing game, and Rodimus’ little mini-me sped across the finish line well ahead of Ratchet’s ambulance.

“I’m quicker where it counts,” Ratchet grumbled, but there was no actual anger in his voice, just good-natured grump.

Rodimus kind of liked Ratchet’s good-natured grump.

Three out of three wins had Rodimus pumping his fists into the air and doing a little dance, there in the middle of the arcade. A few of the other patrons clapped their appreciation for the show, and Rodimus waited for Ratchet to complain about him making a spectacle of himself. It never came. Instead, he stood there with an armful of colorful, paper tickets and cocked an orbital ridge.

“Can we move on now, or do you want to shake that aft some more?”

Rodimus laughed. “Like you weren’t watching?”

“Never said I wasn’t,” Ratchet replied and turned toward the counter, a flutter of tickets ripping free of his arms, prompting Rodimus to rescue them.

Rodimus scooped the tickets up off the ground and joined Ratchet at the counter, where he dumped his armload. The bored alien – organic not metallic – fed the tickets into an automatic counter and as the number called, Rodimus peered at the available prizes behind the counter.

“You pick,” Ratchet said.

“You earned most of them,” Rodimus said, but his optics lingered on one item in particular.

Ratchet must have noticed. Because he looked at it and looked at Rodimus and said, “Really? We spent more earning them than that thing is worth.”

“Yeah but...” Rodimus scratched at his chin and flicked his spoiler upward. “I thought Drift would like it.”

Like a magic word, Ratchet’s expression softened. Rodimus caught a glimpse of the way they felt about each other, and he tried not to be jealous.

“You’re right,” Ratchet said, grudgingly. “The idiot would.” He sighed and made a gesture. “We’ll take the sword.”

It was pure novelty. A stuffed replica of a weapon that was as long as Rodimus was tall, and covered in sequins and glitter. The jewels were sewn in buttons, and the hilt felt like plastic wrapped in foam. It was absolutely hideous, and Drift was going to love it.

The triple-eyed alien blinked all three in succession, grabbed the sword with an abnormally long hand and offered it without meeting their optics once. “You got some points left over. Want anything else?” they asked as a shorter, secondary arm casually flipped the page in a magazine in

front of them.

Rodimus eyed the case beneath the alien. The cheap candies and even cheaper toys weren't at all appealing. He had the best thing in his arms as it was.

"No. Give it to some kid who's short or something," Ratchet said, making the decision for them.

"Suit yourself." Boneless shoulders rippled in what Rodimus guessed was a shrug.

Rodimus hauled the stuffed sword out of the arcade. He couldn't wait to see the look on Drift's face.

"You hungry?" Ratchet asked, and there was a calm in his voice now, an ease in the way he held himself, like he'd spent all his agitation there in the arcade and could now fully enjoy himself.

Rodimus vented and found the last of his tension draining away, too. "I don't think there's a time that I'm not," he joked.

Ratchet snorted a laugh.

They found the vendors next, a cluster of small tracks providing an array of different kinds of treats, some of which they were wise to avoid. Organic foods would do nothing but gum up their systems. There were a few metallic vendors, however, and oil-drenched cakes were on the menu.

Rodimus ate two, the oil smearing over his lips and the corner of his mouth, until Ratchet rolled his eyes and wiped the oil away with his thumb. He popped it into his mouth, licking it clean, and Rodimus pretended the sight didn't make his insides twist with want. Even though it most certainly did.

Ratchet devoured a handful of rust sticks, the flaky rust clinging to his fingertips, and even though he grumbled, he ate every last one of them. But then he had to be mean and lick his fingers clean before Rodimus could do it for him.

He may or may not have dripped some of the sweet oil on Drift's sword.

They washed it all down with a midgrade so delicious, Rodimus was surprised it wasn't manufactured on Cybertron. How aliens could find the proper ratios for a species no one liked was kind of fascinating.

Before they moved on to the next stop on Ratchet's tour of amusement, which was what Rodimus had secretly dubbed their little excursion, Ratchet paused at one more vendor. He picked out a box of gummies with assorted fillings and when Rodimus looked at him with raised optical ridges, he said,

"They're Drift's favorite."

He tucked them into his subspace between one vent and the next, and coughed like it embarrassed him to be caught spoiling his lover. It was, in a singular word, adorable. And if it hadn't been so cute, Rodimus would have teased him mercilessly about it. As it was, he considered it a rare treat to see Ratchet being so sweet.

Ratchet and Fun were two words Rodimus never thought he could put in the same sentence. But

once again, his expectations were blown out of the water when Ratchet dragged him toward their next experience – a haunted spaceship ride. Though calling it a ride was generous since they had to move through it on their own two feet.

It wasn't at all terrifying.

But Rodimus still requested three copies of the picture that spat out at them by the end. Him, brandishing the stuffed sword at the gaping maw of some kind of toothy, tentacled creature while Ratchet attempted to glare it to death.

Drift would love this pic, too.

A throb of longing pinged through Rodimus' spark just then. "Next time, we gotta bring Drift," he said, mostly without thinking about it, because the thought crossed his mind and then he couldn't not say it.

"We will," Ratchet said. He lifted a hand, frowning like he didn't know where to put it, before he dropped it to Rodimus' shoulder. "But right now, it's you and me."

"Trying to figure out if we can do this," Rodimus said.

Ratchet nodded, decisively.

Rodimus managed a smile, and hoped it was full of more bravado than timid hope. "Seems to be going okay so far."

"Yes, it is." Ratchet squeezed Rodimus' shoulder before he took his hand back. Warmth tingled in its absence.

Rodimus squeezed the stuffed sword against his chest.

They hit the game row next, striding through rows of games of chance and skill, most of them rigged. There, Rodimus learned Ratchet was a painfully good shot. It made his spark squeeze a little because they were both aware why Ratchet was good with a gun.

Rodimus bit his bottom lip as he watched Ratchet line up each shot, adjusting for the sway and bob of the cheap gun. Ratchet's hands were important. His hands had saved lives. They weren't meant for taking sparks.

They weren't Ratchet's hands at all. If one wanted to be technical about it.

Pop. Pop. Pop.

Three targets in sharp succession.

A bonus target popped up with a terrifying giggle that was probably meant to be charming, but reminded Rodimus far too much of nightmares he kept burying deeper in his subconscious.

Ratchet sighted down the toy gun and pop, the bonus target spun on its axis and toppled over. Lights and sirens sounded, celebrating his victory. Ratchet couldn't look less impressed if he tried.

Neither could the sales attendant.

“Pick a prize,” she drawled with painted chitinous fingers pointing upward to the toys dangling from a corrugated roof, swaying lightly on their plastic hooks.

“And not for Drift this time,” Ratchet said with a pointed look.

“You won it,” Rodimus said.

He hugged the stuffed sword against his chestplate, dragging in the cheap scent of it. The blunted tip kept dragging on the ground because it was just a shade too long. Pale cream fabric was turning a gray shade.

Ratchet twisted his jaw and surveyed the toys. The sales attendant’s filamentous wings flittered on her back. They were actually kind of pretty, even if they did remind Rodimus too much of Insecticons. Still, he bet they were functional. He’d often wondered what it would be like to fly, and not in a space ship or with a jet pack, but with one’s own frame and power.

“You sure?” the sales attendant asked, dragging Rodimus’ attention back to the very important matter of Ratchet choosing which cheap toy to take home with them.

“Do I look like I’m not?” Ratchet asked, gruff, maybe a touch embarrassed given the flush in his energy field.

The insectoid female fluttered her weird eyes and reached up with a spindly arm to unhook a giant pillow. It looked like a cartoonish version of a shooting star, bright whites and golds spilling from the tail in a streak, while the five pointed yellow star pushed forward, glittering in the dim light. She handed it over to Ratchet, who tucked it under his arm with a grunted ‘thanks’.

“Interesting choice,” Rodimus said as they turned away from the shooting game and ambled out, heading toward the massive Ferris wheel. It lit up the atmosphere and was the only thing Rodimus had been able to see from the loading dock.

It was big enough even Cybertronians could ride it.

Ratchet slowed and Rodimus caught up to him, so they walked side by side. Ratchet didn’t say anything, but he worked his jaw, frame tense, as if he were about to plunge into battle.

Rodimus nibbled on his bottom lip. This was one of those moments where he usually sort of threw Drift at Ratchet and took a step back, because he had no idea what he was doing, and he really didn’t want to frag things up. You know, like he always did.

They ended up at the back of the fairly impressive line for the Ferris wheel. Luckily, it was large enough they’d probably board on the next go-round, but that still meant waiting. Rodimus shifted from foot to foot, trying to pretend he wasn’t uneasy with the flustered medic beside him.

“It’s not for me,” Ratchet said as the wheel started turning.

Rodimus blinked and looked at him. “What?”

Ratchet sighed, long and aggrieved, and turned toward Rodimus, untucking the stuffed star from under his arm. “This one’s yours,” he said and unceremoniously shoved the toy toward Rodimus.

The stuffed star tumbled into his arms, and Rodimus had to juggle a little to keep a grip on the sword as well, so both wouldn't land on the dirty ground. His face heated as he looked into the grinning face of the stuffed star. It was, in a way, kind of like being given a Rodimus Star.

"You picked it for me?" It came out as a question, though he'd meant it as a statement.

Ratchet grunted and folded his arms, staring hard at the Ferris wheel, willing it with ocular fire to turn faster. "It's not a space ship or anything, but yeah, it's for you."

Spaceship...?

Oh. The Lost Light.

That *so* didn't count in the grand scheme of things. It was important, and Rodimus would forever be grateful. Words really couldn't express what Drift had done for him there.

But the toy? It was different. It was special. Rodimus couldn't explain how or why, specifically, just that holding it made his spark dance and his internals warm. His fingers sank into the cheap plush. The stitched on smile was absurdly cartoonish.

It was the sweetest thing anyone had ever given him.

"Thanks," Rodimus murmured. Heat gathered in his optics, and he blinked rapidly to chase it away. "I mean that, Ratch." He tapped Ratchet's side with the hilt of the pillow-sword. "I really like it."

"It's just a cheap toy," Ratchet grumbled, but his face shaded pink, and his field rippled with embarrassment where it touched Rodimus'.

Rodimus moved closer, until he could feel the heat of Ratchet's frame against his own. "It's more than that."

The jiggle of happiness in his spark turned into a full blown dance when Ratchet tentatively lifted his arm and curled it around Rodimus' lower back, tucking him against Ratchet's side.

"You're welcome," Ratchet said, gruff.

Rodimus' spoiler danced before he could rein it in.

And then the damn line started to move forward because it was time to load up the next batch. The moment shattered. Ratchet moved away so they could shuffle forward like everyone else, and Rodimus struggled not to pout.

It seemed to take forever, the wheel spinning one by one to offload old passengers and load new ones. He and Ratchet were one of the last to board, and all it took was one look from Ratchet for the attendant to give up on demanding Rodimus hand over the plushes while they took their turn.

In the small gondola, their knees knocked, and their legs tangled, and their feet brushed. Rodimus had a stuffed toy to either side of him, and he fiddled with the trailing fire of the shooting star, his gaze out the open window.

The wheel lurched to a start, and it was a bit disorientating. Tinny music started to play, cheerful

and upbeat, and lights flashed to match the rhythm. The wheel circled slowly, circling them higher and higher into the air, until the whole carnival was spread out beneath them, and the space station, too. Until Rodimus could squint and see the Lost Light docked in the distance.

“Drift would have loved this,” Rodimus said before he thought twice about it. But then, it wasn’t like he could forget the ghost of the mech they both loved, drifting between them, binding them together.

“He’d have said something about the energetic aura of the whole carnival being good or whatever,” Rodimus added with a little laugh. It was pitslag, and he knew it. Frag, even Drift knew it.

Sometimes, though. Sometimes you needed that pitslag for something to hold onto. Rodimus understood that a little too well.

Ratchet snorted a sound that could have been an agreeing laugh.

Rodimus slanted him a look. “Is Drift even okay with us, you know, doing this without him?” he asked.

He realized he hadn’t asked, had just assumed. Which was wrong because Ratchet’d been harping about how it wasn’t two plus one, but three altogether, so wouldn’t it be wrong for two to go off on their own? Rodimus had told Drift about this little venture, and Drift had wished them luck, but was he secretly upset about it?

He should have asked.

“It was his idea,” Ratchet said with a scowl. He looked offended at the mere thought he’d be rude enough not to ask.

Rodimus’ optics widened. “Seriously?”

Ratchet leaned forward in the gondola, his face contorting into a weird expression. “Me and you and me and Roddy got it easy, you know. But you and Roddy got a lot of work to do,” he said, obviously attempting to imitate Drift.

Badly.

Rodimus laughed. “The words sound like him, but that’s a terrible impersonation.”

“Everyone’s a critic,” Ratchet grumped, but there was a curl to his lip that suggested he wasn’t offended.

“It’s cute though,” Rodimus pointed out as he dragged his attention away from the view and back to Ratchet. They were circling back down toward the ground anyway.

“I’m old, not cute,” Ratchet said in a flat tone.

“There are different kinds of cute,” Rodimus corrected. He nudged Ratchet with the tip of his foot, their knees knocking together. “But this is okay? I mean, I know it was Drift’s idea, so...”

Ratchet waved a hand, cutting him off. “So nothing,” he said. “Drift put the idea in my head, yes,

but that doesn't mean I don't want to do it." He leaned close enough to rest a hand on Rodimus' knee. "I meant it when I said we'd try and make this work." He paused and a crooked grin emerged. "Spending time with you isn't the worst thing."

Rodimus hugged the shooting star against his chest. "But not the best thing either."

"That's not what I said." Ratchet's grip on his knee tightened, as if in warning.

Rodimus cocked an orbital ridge, daring Ratchet to lie and tell him otherwise. Ratchet was trying, but that didn't mean he was ready to dive in headfirst. Those were two different things.

Ratchet sighed and scrubbed a hand down his face. "Look, Rodimus, if you want romance and sweet nothings, that's Drift's area of expertise, not mine. I can't promise that so if it's what you want, I'm going to fail."

"No, I don't want you to be anything but what you are," Rodimus said, and cycled a ventilation, daring to rest his free hand over Ratchet's. "I just want to make sure you're here because you want to be and not because you have to be." He squinted. "I'm not even sure that makes sense."

"It does." Ratchet snorted a laugh. "I'm starting to learn your language."

"It's the same language!" Rodimus protested, his spoiler jerking upright.

Ratchet shook his head. "Yeah, not even close." He smiled and shifted so he could look out the window as they rose back into the night. He turned his hand over so their fingers touched. "I'm having fun. And I mean that."

Rodimus squinted at him again. He sensed no dishonesty in Ratchet's field though. Besides, Ratchet wasn't the sort to lie to spare Rodimus' feelings.

Drift would though. And that was another problem entirely.

"Okay, good," Rodimus said. He turned his head to watch the scenery, too. "What's next?"

Ratchet's index finger traced odd symbols on his palm. "That's up to you. I think it's your turn to pick now."

His turn? What else was there to do? They'd played games and walked around and enjoyed the rides and won prizes and right now, were in the top of the pick, the Ferris wheel. It was one of the best dates Rodimus ever had.

But being together platonically wasn't the only wrinkle they had to iron out.

Rodimus squirmed as the Ferris wheel hit the apex and creakingly slow, started to descend once more. "Can we leave?"

"You're not having fun?"

Sparks danced off Rodimus' audials. "I am, it's just..." He coughed a vent, trying to pull off nonchalant and failing. "We could have fun elsewhere. In private. With a berth." He gave Ratchet a sidelong look.

There was a moment of stunned silence before Ratchet chuckled, and his field swept over Rodimus', thick with heat. "You want to frag me, Rodimus?" he asked, his vocals abruptly dark and gritty, like a rumbling engine.

"Or you know, whatever." Rodimus shrugged and stared out the window as the view rapidly scrolled away from a beautiful vista, to the cluttered and bright stalls of the carnival.

Ratchet leaned back and his foot nudged Rodimus'. "Sounds good to me."

The Ferris wheel came to a stop, and it swapped out old passengers for new. It was a process which took several minutes, and Rodimus couldn't keep still. He kept sneaking glances at Ratchet, but the medic looked unbothered, staring out the opposite window as their gondola creaked slowly toward the exit ramp.

By the time they disembarked, Rodimus was ready to leap out of his armor from anticipation. He tucked Drift's sword under his arm, and the shooting star against his chest, and then startled when Ratchet's hand claimed his free one. His optics widened as their fingers tangled, and their joined hands set into a soft swing.

"What are you..." Rodimus trailed off, not sure what to say, but pretty sure calling attention to the action would only make Ratchet stop. And the last thing he wanted was for Ratchet to stop.

"You want romance, don't you?" Ratchet asked.

Rodimus swept his glossa over his lips. "Yeah. But you said--"

"Never mind what I said," Ratchet huffed, and tightened his hold on Rodimus' fingers, reeling him closer so their strides matched, like they were here together and not coincidentally next to each other.

Ratchet was a bundle of contradictions.

"Whatever you say," Rodimus said, because he didn't want to push.

This was nice. It felt genuine, like they were here not because of Drift, but because they liked one another for no secondary reason. Like a courtship or the first flush of attraction.

For the first time since this whole mess began, Rodimus started to think this might actually work out.

~

Drift and Ratchet's shared habsuite was empty when they arrived, a bit cold as though no one had been around all day. The lights brightened once their presence was recognized.

Rodimus clutched the shooting star and the sword a bit tighter, his head on a swivel as he peered around the room. "Where's Drift?"

"Still with Perceptor, I'd wager," Ratchet said with a dismissive, unconcerned tone. The door slid

shut behind him. "He'll sneak into the berth sometime tonight. We'll probably wake up with him on top of us."

Rodimus squeezed the toys until he heard the stuffing squeak. "We?"

Ratchet arched an orbital ridge. "Were you planning on leaving?"

"No." Rodimus let a smile curve his lips, while warmth bubbled in his abdomen like the first time someone told him he was pretty. "I just like to hear you say 'we'."

Ratchet gave him a long look before he suddenly approached Rodimus and lifted the stuffed toys out of his hand. Rodimus blinked as Ratchet tossed them aside, kind of unceremoniously, and then he turned back toward Rodimus. His expression was intent, but soft around the edges, which was pretty weird.

Weirder still was the way Ratchet cupped his face, thumbs sweeping over his cheeks, before he leaned in and pressed his lips to Rodimus'. Heat rattled and clunked through Rodimus' lines, stilted at first due to shock, but gaining in strength as Ratchet's glossa touched the seam of his lips, tasting him.

A shiver crept up Rodimus' spinal strut. He grabbed Ratchet's arms, gripped around his elbows, and opened his mouth to the press of Ratchet's glossa. It swept inside, traced the edges of his denta, slow and deliberate and savoring.

Rodimus' knees shook.

Ratchet pulled back, his thumbs curving soft against Rodimus' cheeks again. "Is that what you had in mind?" he asked.

"It's a start," Rodimus said, and surprised himself with how staticky his voice was. He felt, well, he wasn't sure what to call what he felt, save that he never thought he would feel it for Ratchet.

Ratchet who had slid his hands free of Rodimus' face, only to grab the nearest of Rodimus' hands and start towing him to the berth. The very large berth easily fit Ratchet and Drift, and could now accommodate Rodimus on the nights he stayed with them. More often than not, probably less than Drift wanted but more than Ratchet could tolerate.

Rodimus hadn't figured out the right balance. He didn't want to push his limits. Small steps, he knew. Triads weren't built in a day.

Ratchet squeezed his hand, and Rodimus' spark took up a faster, deeper rhythm. Unexpected enthusiasm sent heat pulsing through his lines, and the wobbling in his knees was probably embarrassingly audible.

Ratchet dropped down onto the edge of the berth, and didn't give Rodimus time to hesitate or debate or loiter. He tugged Rodimus into his lap, Rodimus' knees pressed into the berth to either side of Ratchet's hips. Hands found Rodimus' waist, pulling him closer, and it was an easy thing to slot his mouth to Ratchet's again.

He draped his arms over Ratchet's shoulders, their chestplates colliding, the kiss deepening. It was slow, languid, like trying to taste and memorize the shape of each other's mouths. Rodimus couldn't remember the last time someone kissed him like this. It was too far in the past, if it had

ever happened at all.

Ratchet's hands swept up and down his sides. "This okay?" he asked against Rodimus' mouth. His voice was low, intimate, soft like Rodimus didn't know it could be.

Rodimus laughed quietly. He honestly didn't know what else to do with the nervous energy bubbling up in his belly. "Yeah. I just didn't expect it, you know."

"I don't always throw mechs down and frag them silly," Ratchet said with a quirk to his lips that made him seem a thousand years younger and completely kissable.

Though the mental image now planted in Rodimus' processor made his engine rev. The idea of Ratchet throwing him down and having his wicked away with Rodimus? Yeah, that'll be one for private time in the washrack later.

"Unless it's what they want, of course," Ratchet added and his hands slid up Rodimus' back, finely jointed fingers finding Rodimus' spoiler hinges and giving them a pinch.

Rodimus' backstrut arched. He shivered and tilted forward with a groan, his forehead finding Ratchet's shoulder. He went strutless, a limp pile of flame-colored armor in Ratchet's lap as Ratchet fondled his spoiler over and over again. He stirred up jagged streaks of heat through Rodimus' lines, until it pooled in his groin, an ache impossible to ignore.

"Is that what you want?" Ratchet asked, his voice like a fine-tuned engine as it rumbled against Rodimus' audial.

Rodimus rocked in Ratchet's lap. "This is good, too," he said, and abandoned all semblance of self-control.

He let his panels open, spike pressurizing, the wet tip of it grinding slow and insistent over Ratchet's abdomen. Pleasure wound and twisted in his belly, forming knots of need, while his valve throbbed.

Ratchet hummed an approving noise. He pinched Rodimus' spoiler hinge again, and sharp pain-pleasure-*good* marched up Rodimus' backstrut and pinged his cortex. He shivered, rocking harder against Ratchet, wanting more.

"You can spike me," Rodimus panted as his fingers curled into Ratchet's back, hooking on an overhanging armor plate, some kind of transformation seam.

Ratchet vented against the side of his intake, his glossa tracing a wet path over Rodimus' cables. "Like this?" Something hot nudged at Rodimus' rim, coating itself in his slick and prodding at his anterior node with little skating brushes.

Rodimus' cables tensed. He rocked down, trying to catch the spikehead with the rim of his valve, but failing to match the angle. He growled in frustration, hands forming fists against Ratchet's back.

"Not fair," he whined.

Ratchet chuckled and his hands dropped to Rodimus' aft. He gripped tight and abruptly stood up.

Rodimus' head spun. He scrambled for a hold, legs tightening around Ratchet's waist, the hot length of Ratchet's spike nestling against his valve. Each movement made it rub enticingly, sending jolts of pleasure through Rodimus' array.

Ratchet spun and flattened Rodimus on the berth, on his back. He knelt between Rodimus' thighs and threaded their fingers together. He hovered over Rodimus, and there was absolutely no threat in it, not even when he pinned Rodimus' hands over his head. Ratchet's mouth fell over his in a sweet kiss, his hips rocking against Rodimus', grinding spike over valve in a slow stir of molten heat.

Rodimus shivered. It was romantic, not the rough and tumble he'd expected. It felt like Ratchet actually wanted him, and the thought made his spark tremble.

He crossed his legs behind Ratchet's back and tried to urge him closer with his heels. Ratchet was not to be convinced, however. He nipped at Rodimus' lips, licked at his mouth, kissed him slowly and carefully, without urgency. It was sweet and intimate and everything Rodimus didn't expect.

Rodimus squirmed, loosing a pathetic noise, because he wanted, and Ratchet was taking too long. It felt as though his spark would throb right out of its casing.

"Come on," Rodimus said against Ratchet's mouth, somewhat muffled and most definitely not a whine. He rocked his hips upward, shuddering as Ratchet's spike glanced over his anterior node again. "Frag me, damn it."

Ratchet chuckled and nosed into Rodimus' throat, denta grazing over his cables. "You're so impatient." He rippled his fingers around Rodimus', like he was trying to speak Hand but Rodimus hadn't learned how to read it yet.

"That's because you've been revving me up all night," Rodimus retorted and tightened his thighs against Ratchet's hips. "Come on, Ratch. *Please.*"

Ratchet's field pushed against his, wrapping him up in a heavy blanket of approval and lust. "I'm going to savor that sound forever," he murmured and then he shifted his weight, adjusted his angle, and Rodimus moaned as Ratchet finally sank home, thick and throbbing over every one of Rodimus' internal nodes.

His backstrut arched, head tipping back, throat bared to the onslaught of Ratchet's denta and lips. Ratchet didn't linger, setting up a steady pace that had him thrusting long and deep, grinding against Rodimus' exterior sensors, building his pleasure to a crescendo that was almost embarrassing for it's quickness.

"Primus," Rodimus gasped, squeezing Ratchet's hands, his frame rising up to meet Ratchet's as their fields synced, pulsing heat and desire in tandem.

Genuine desire. Need Ratchet couldn't fake or pretend. He actually wanted this, wanted *Rodimus*. For himself, not for Drift's sake.

"You can let go," Ratchet murmured, and Rodimus could never explain why that one statement seemed to shoot straight to his spark and send out a bloom of warmth that coursed through his entire frame.

Not in a thousand years would he understand why it melted him to his core, and why he shattered

into overload on the next sparkbeat, his moan swallowed by Ratchet's lips. He shook and shivered beneath Ratchet, thighs clamped tight, valve rippling, and Ratchet eased his thrusts to extend Rodimus' pleasure. As if his enjoyment was all that mattered in that moment.

The strongest of tremors eased, and Ratchet made as if to pull back, until Rodimus tightened his thighs and tore his lips away.

"Nope," he said, popping the syllable, squeezing Ratchet's hands in his. "Keep going."

Ratchet's expression flickered with disgruntlement, but the need in his field was raw and trembling. His hips rocked forward as if unconsciously, his spike grazing over sensitized nodes and making Rodimus shiver.

"You--"

"--Can overload again if you're good enough," Rodimus said with a smug wink and a hint of a challenge.

Ratchet thrust into him again, a little harsher, a little faster. Rodimus shivered, his valve spiraling tight, the echoes of overload whipping around and surging back toward build-up. Mmm. His vents roared, and Rodimus sucked his bottom lip into his mouth, gnawing on it.

"You think I can't tell you're goading me?" Ratchet asked as he unthreaded their fingers, and Rodimus tried not to mourn their loss.

It was easier, since one of Ratchet's hands gripped his hip, pulling him into each thrust. The other curled around his spike, thumb sweeping the tip and swirling around the copious pre-fluid.

Rodimus hissed a vent and fisted the covers, his spike throbbing in Ratchet's grip. "I don't care if you can or not, so long as you keep doing that," he groaned.

Ratchet chuckled, and it actually sounded fond. His lips tasted the curve of Rodimus' jaw as he pushed in faster, and harder, jolting Rodimus' frame with each thrust, the head of his spike crashing against Rodimus' ceiling node.

He shuddered, pleasure pinging up his spinal strut in hot waves, his thighs aching where they clamped around Ratchet's hip. The hand on his aft squeezed rhythmically, to the same beat as Ratchet's thrusts.

The berth creaked. Rodimus grabbed Ratchet's head, dragging his mouth close enough for a sloppy kiss, an exchange of puffed ex-vents that hinted of the sweets they'd consumed earlier. His spoiler pushed into the cushion, and Ratchet loomed over him, a large weight that comforted rather than alarmed him.

They moved together in a discordant rhythm, only because Rodimus hadn't been with Ratchet long enough to know the dance. Then again, he'd never been with anyone long enough to learn the music.

It's a terrifying thought, the idea that this tentative thing among he and Ratchet and Drift, might actually be a thing of permanence. It's a terrifying, exhilarating thought, and the realization must have crashed into his field because Ratchet's pulsed back, full of warmth and desire and not love, of course not. They were still tolerating each other. But the affection? Oh, that was so sweet and

obvious and cozy, and Rodimus soaked in it like an oil bath.

He tipped his head back and moaned, rising up to meet Ratchet's deep thrusts, release coiling and tightening in his belly and his lines. Ratchet's mouth was warm and wet on his intake, tasting his cables, nibbling at them.

"G-guess you're good enough," Rodimus managed to gasp out as his valve tightened and he struggled to focus on holding back, rather than stealing pleasure again while Ratchet still sought out his first.

Ratchet chuckled against his intake. "Kid, you have no idea," he growled, the vibrations fast and furious over Rodimus' cables.

He shuddered. He lost focus and his backstrut bowed as he overloaded again, sharper and heavier this time. The heat poured through his limbs, rattled through his spark, sent his vision into dizzying stripes of static. His spike throbbed, spurting a wet mess against Ratchet's belly and spattering down over Rodimus' own.

Somewhere, in the sensitive ripples of his valve, he felt the bloom of heat that was Ratchet's overload. Ratchet's grip on him tightened, and he held Rodimus on his spike, hips working in small circles. Ratchet moaned, low and deep, and the sound of it sizzled through Rodimus' sensory suite. He could have sworn he heard his designation somewhere in the sound.

And then Ratchet kissed him again, mouth sloppy and wet, and Rodimus didn't think about much else but the taste of Ratchet on his glossa, and the hot throb of fading ecstasy. His hands dropped to cupping the back of Ratchet's neck, keeping him close, and Ratchet's hands moved to smooth Rodimus' hips to his thighs and back again.

It was... a lot gentler than Rodimus could have ever expected.

Ratchet pressed his forehead to Rodimus', and his voice spilled out in a soft chuckle. "I didn't break you, did I?"

Rodimus chuffed a vent. "I should be asking you that."

"I'm not--" Ratchet cut off with an aggrieved grunt and pulled back, easing free of Rodimus with overly careful movements. "I'm going to let that one slide."

Rodimus grinned. "Because you know it's true."

"Because I'm too tired to argue." Ratchet sat back on his heels, while Rodimus' legs rose on either side of him, and he rested his hands on Rodimus' knees. He tilted his head and gave Rodimus a strange look. "Huh."

Rodimus pushed up on his elbows. "What?" He was painfully aware of the transfluid splattered on his abdomen and groin and the mess no doubt seeping from his valve. He looked wrecked and debauched, and usually, this was the point past conquests leered and tried turning him over for round two.

He wouldn't describe the look on Ratchet's face as a leer. In fact, he wasn't sure how to describe it at all.

Ratchet squeezed his knees. “Why isn’t this weird?”

Rodimus blinked. “Is it supposed to be?” Though come to think of it, Ratchet had a point. Rodimus couldn’t put into words why, but yeah, why wasn’t this awkward?

“Yes,” Ratchet said, but then he sighed and patted Rodimus’ knees, scooting off the berth. “Never mind. I’m glad it isn’t. Don’t move.” He pointed at Rodimus firmly, like someone used to giving commands and having them obeyed.

Yeah, Ratchet had always been way better at that than Rodimus. He snapped his fingers and people obeyed without a second thought. Rodimus usually had to cajole or threaten or wheedle.

Rodimus didn’t get up, but he did wriggle around to get more comfortable, tracking Ratchet as he stepped into the washrack. Solvent splattered, something clattered across the floor, and Ratchet muttered a curse. A moment later, he emerged with a damp metalmesh and his own frame hastily wiped clean.

Rodimus made himself available as the berth dipped, and Ratchet sat beside him, sweetly careful as he wiped at Rodimus’ belly and inner thighs. He had a look of intense focus on his face, like he did something much more complicated than giving Rodimus a post-interface wipedown.

He was trying, too. He was putting as much effort into this as Rodimus was.

Rodimus chewed on his bottom lip as a swell of affection burst in his spark. He put his hand on Ratchet’s wrist before the medic could pull away, and blue optics shifted to him, ridges raised in question.

“Thanks,” Rodimus said.

“I seriously question your previous partners if no one’s bothered to wipe you down before,” Ratchet said with a grunt, a touch of color in his face. His gaze slid away, and he tried to pull free.

Rodimus didn’t let him go. “That’s not what I meant.” He cycled a ventilation, steadying himself. “Thanks for tonight. For trying, and you know, giving me a chance. Primus knows I’ve not made any kind of a good impression on you.”

Ratchet’s shoulders drifted down. His expression softened. “That’s not something you need to thank me for, kid.” He sat back down and loosened Rodimus’ fingers from his wrist, but only so he could tangle their hands together. “Yeah, I started out doing this because of Drift, and yeah, tonight was his idea. But he’s not the reason I had fun. And he’s not the one in this berth right now.”

Heat flooded Rodimus’ face before he could stop it. His spark throbbed too many fast beats, and he wanted to squirm away from Ratchet, turn on his side so Ratchet couldn’t see his face. But their hands were linked together, and there was nowhere to hide.

“That’s...” Rodimus’ vocalizer crackled, and he rebooted it. “That’s good to know.”

Ratchet snorted and leaned forward, tugging Rodimus’ hand upward at the same time. He brushed his lips over Rodimus’ knuckles before he untangled their fingers and rose from the berth. He threw the dirtied mesh cloth in the laundry bin, flicked all of the lights off save for a small lamp near the door, then returned to the bedside.

He stared at the berth like it was a puzzle.

It took Rodimus a minute to realize what the problem was, and then he scooted over a foot or two and pointedly patted the empty space beside him.

“Plenty of room,” he pointed out and hoped he didn’t sound like a hopeless romantic.

“I know there is. It’s my berth.” Ratchet joined Rodimus on it like he hadn’t stood there for a solid minute, hesitating.

Rodimus didn’t wait for him to settle. If he waited, there would be another one of those long, awkward silences, and he’d thought they’d gotten past the awkward part. Instead, he tucked himself against Ratchet’s side before the medic got comfortable.

Ratchet grumbled, but he curved an arm around Rodimus anyway and didn’t seem to mind Rodimus making a pillow of his shoulder. His engine idled, warm and rumbling, and Rodimus found the sound soothing.

“Drift coming back tonight?” Rodimus asked because if there was ever a safe topic, Drift was it.

Ratchet huffed. “He’ll come back when he’s ready. Last I checked, he and Percy were bonding. Whatever the frag that means.”

Rodimus grinned. “That’s one weird friendship.” He paused and inched his palm over Ratchet until it flattened on the medic’s windshield. “You’re not... um...”

“Worried?” Ratchet finished for him. He patted Rodimus’ lower back. “Not at all. Perceptor’s Perceptor.”

Rodimus squinted. “Not sure if I should take that as a compliment or an insult.”

“Take it as a sign we should recharge,” Ratchet grumped.

“Old mech,” Rodimus teased, careful to keep his tone light and playful.

Judging by the light slap to his aft, he succeeded. Rodimus grinned and dutifully offlined his optics, focusing on the sounds of Ratchet’s frame, sounds he’d eventually memorize. More gratitude held at the tip of his glossa, but Rodimus didn’t voice it.

As Ratchet had said, it wasn’t necessary. Rodimus believed him.

For a start, this was a damn good one.

He slid into recharge to the steady, if not a bit snuffling, rhythm of Ratchet venting.

~

A sound in the stillness jolted Rodimus out of recharge. His optics snapped open, and he tried to roll, but there was a weight beneath him, and a hand on his spoiler, palm flat against the plane of

it.

“Shh. It’s just me.”

Relief flooded his system. Rodimus went limp against what he recognized to be Ratchet beneath him, vents snoring as he remained in recharge. “Where’ve you been?” Rodimus whispered as he dropped his head back to Ratchet’s shoulder.

“With Perceptor. Didn’t Ratchet tell you?”

“Yeah. Forgot.” Rodimus hummed. “Didja have fun?”

Recharge kept trying to reclaim him. Rodimus valiantly fought it off as the berth jostled, and Drift climbed up into it, nestling himself carefully against Rodimus’ back and tangling their legs together.

“Of course.” Drift’s arm slung over his midsection, and his hand brushed Ratchet’s belly as a result. “Did you?”

Rodimus chuckled softly. “Actually, yeah.” He offlined his optics and focused on the warmth of Drift at his back and Ratchet rumbling beneath him. “Got you a present.”

Drift’s field fluttered with interest. “What is it?”

“Show you later.” Rodimus wriggled a bit to get perfectly comfortable and cycled a ventilation or two. “We gotta go back, all three of us. And you and me gotta win Ratchet a prize. Fair’s fair.”

Drift laughed against his audial and brushed a kiss over Rodimus’ cheek. “Sounds like fun.” He nuzzled the back of Rodimus’ head. “I’m glad you two got along. I was worried.”

“Fft. We’re fine. We’re big mechs.”

“I know. I still worry.”

Drift’s hand slid to Rodimus’ waist, but it was a mostly chaste touch as he gave Rodimus a little squeeze. “What did you guys do?”

“We can talk about it in the morning.”

It took Rodimus a stupidly long amount of time to realize that it was Ratchet who’d said the latter, his voice emerging in a rocky groan of annoyance. Rodimus’ berth shifted beneath him, and his optics snapped open as a broad arm suddenly wrapped around his waist and tugged him up and over Ratchet, until he was snuggled up on the medic’s other side, said arm still curved around him, his head now pillowed on Ratchet’s opposite shoulder.

Drift laughed and yelped as Ratchet’s other hand grabbed and pulled, tucking Drift in under his other hand.

“Shhh,” Ratchet said once he had them tucked where he apparently wanted them. He patted their frames in friendly staccato. “Recharge now. Babble in the morning.”

Rodimus chuckled and rubbed his face against Ratchet’s shoulder, soaking up the combined

warmth of their fields. He reached across Ratchet and found Drift reaching back, tangling their fingers together with a little squeeze.

He met Drift's optics over the swell of Ratchet's chestplate, and they shared a warm smile in the dim glow of their combined biolights. A tiny knot of tension eased in Rodimus' spark, and he shuttered his optics.

Oh yeah.

They were totally going to make this work.

End Notes

Feedback, as always, is greatly appreciated, welcomed, and encouraged. :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!